# COMMENTARY ON "INDIVIDUAL LIFE, SOCIAL LIFE AND DIALECTICAL KNOWLEDGE"

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A naive reading of Rodrigo Steimberg's excellent article (2024) might lead one to conclude that, because it makes no explicit references to its political implications, it constitutes a merely scientific contribution to the understanding of reality. On the contrary, and as a precaution against this possible naive interpretation, this commentary on the article seeks to precisely explain the political significance of the research presented therein. To understand this, it is useful to consider that Steimberg's (2024) contribution can be framed not only within recent advances in understanding life as a process where a type of activity or causality unfolds that differs from the purely physical-chemical, as noted by certain contemporary literature on life reviewed in the article (Johnston, 2018, 2019; Deacon, 2011); but also within the recent contributions of the practical critique approach to understanding the limits of the method of logical representation, the determination of alienated subjectivity in capital, and the overcoming of capitalist alienation (Marx, 1999; Iñigo Carrera, 2004; Starosta, 2015). In what follows, I will first briefly reiterate the developments of Deacon and Johnston reviewed in the article, focusing on the type of knowledge they maintain corresponds to knowledge of life, and then examine the meaning that this type of approach can find within the practical critique framework.

Both Johnston and Deacon point out that life constitutes a type of existence that, while providing continuity to inorganic matter insofar as it is governed by physical and chemical laws, simultaneously represents a discontinuity or break with it; that is, it inaugurates a type of causality that does not simply obey these laws: teleological causality. Thus, following Hegel, Johnston indicates that the type of knowledge that allows us to understand life in its specificity as a determined negation ( Aufhebung ) of simple mechanism and chemistry is speculative or dialectical knowledge. A similar consideration is found in Deacon's recovery of Aristotle, according to whom the emergence of life implies that mechanical determinations operating through formal causality become organic determinations that obey a final causality. In this sense, their arguments can be understood as a critique of the dominant way of conceiving scientific knowledge, centered on the traditional notion of causality, which does not correspond to the type of cause that constitutes the affirmation of organic laws through the very negation of physicochemical laws. However, by the very nature of Deacon and Johnston's approaches, they do not intend to transcend a particular horizon of traditional science: the acquisition of knowledge as an end in itself. Thus, the difference

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between the dialectical explanation offered by these contributions is not presented as a critique of traditional-dominant science. Rather, it could be said that this type of explanation seeks to complement the established body of scientific knowledge by shedding light on issues that it has not adequately addressed. Conversely, the contributions of practical critique point to the limitations of the traditional-dominant form of science as a problem of an eminently political nature.

According to this approach, the fundamental limitation of traditional scientific knowledge lies primarily in its inability to recognize the evolution of the necessary relationships it studies into new necessary relationships, asserting itself through the very negation of those necessary relationships. This issue, also highlighted in some of the literature analyzed by Steimberg (2024), constitutes the limitation that generally prevents traditional scientific knowledge from becoming dialectical knowledge. However, practical critique goes further, identifying the fundamental political limitation of traditional science as its inability to understand the transformation of the capitalist social relation into the communist social relation—a transformation that requires dialectical knowledge itself as its necessary means of realization. In this case, we are dealing with dialectical knowledge that, by its practical-political nature, is defined as practical critique, and as such, it corresponds to a type of practical-material effectiveness distinct from that of traditional scientific knowledge. The form of practical-material effectiveness corresponding to traditional scientific knowledge consists of its implementation by individual private subjects, through its objectification as technology, or by the state, in the form of its public policies and institutional arrangements. Thus, it is limited to being a particular mode through which the capitalist social relation is reproduced. Meanwhile, critical practical dialectical knowledge achieves its full practical-material effectiveness when it is carried by all the individuals that make up the universe of private producers, so that each one recognizes the determination of their individual subjectivity by capital as the bearer of the power to transcend themselves within the communist social relation. In this sense, while the objective of traditional scientific work is to produce a body of knowledge to be deployed by private subjects or by their general state representative, practical critique aims at the formation of the consciousness of all private individuals. However, understanding what has been stated here is not possible without explaining the simplest determination presented by the organization of social life today, which determines the necessity for knowledge to take the form of practical critique: the private character of social labor.

The private nature of social labor, that is, the inability of each productive organ to participate directly in the organization of the labor of the others, constitutes, by its very nature, the alienation of the power to establish organic unity among the various individual labor processes as a result of the products of labor themselves, thus determined as commodities. As a form of organizing the unity between the production and social consumption of private producers, this alienation does not take the form of a power imposed externally on their subjectivity, but rather is realized through the personal freedom inherent in private subjects (Iñigo Carrera, 2007). Therefore, insofar as the production and exchange of commodities constitute the form through which this unity takes place, they need to express their capacity to relate to one another, their value, in a single equivalent that makes them immediately commensurable and that fluidly mediates their exchanges. The commodity

thus distinguished from the set of commodities as the general equivalent is determined in this process as money, as the universal medium of expression of value. Then, value itself, in its monetary form, carries the power to set in motion the work of various private producers as part of a single collective labor process, with no other aim than to incessantly increase the mass of value, which is advanced for this purpose through the extraction of surplus value. We have thus far seen a process by which the simplest form of organization of social life, the commodity, affirms itself through its own negation in order to define itself as money, and money, in turn, affirms itself as capital.

Now, the key to the issue we are addressing here is the fact that capital does not simply extract surplus value from the workers it employs without transforming the form that social production takes. Rather, it has an inherent need to develop the productive forces of social labor in order to lower the cost of reproducing labor power and thus increase the portion of the working day dedicated to the production of (relative) surplus value. This process, in its most developed form—large-scale industry—has as its fundamental component the objectification of simple physicochemical laws of causality as machinery. We thus arrive at capital's own necessity for scientific knowledge in its traditional form. This refers, first and foremost, to scientific knowledge in the natural sciences, those that consist of understanding physicochemical causal relationships in their simplest form, namely, as the repetition of the unfolding of necessary relationships that do not manifest themselves through self-negation. But it also stems from scientific knowledge of human society—the social sciences—which serves as the vehicle through which this constantly transforming social production is governed as an incessant process of capital accumulation. Thus, we see that the traditional form of scientific knowledge, the one that cannot grasp the qualitative transformations of relations of necessity, constitutes the form of knowledge through which capital reproduces itself as the general social relation.

We are now finally in a position to explain succinctly why dialectical knowledge is the only one capable of overcoming capitalist social relations. As we have noted, the simplest determinant of the organization of the unity between social production and consumption in the capitalist mode of production lies in the alienation of the powers to organize this process as powers of the products of labor. Therefore, overcoming the capitalist mode of production presupposes that the formally free consciousness through which this alienation is realized is transformed into a consciousness that is fully free because it no longer needs to confront an external power to organize its individual labor process as a social labor process. In other words, into a consciousness that is free by fully recognizing its character as an individual organ of the social life process and can autonomously organize its participation in the process of production and consumption. This power can only develop on the condition that the alienated individuals within capital dialectically recognize the capitalist social relation as bearing the power to affirm themselves through their own negation in the communist social relation. It is therefore a power that in itself constitutes a process of self-affirmation through its own negation, a process that can only be set in motion by a subjectivity that dialectically understands its own potentiality, that knows itself in its alienation. It is also, by its very nature, a process of self-affirmation through its own negation, which presupposes a practical-

material effectiveness distinct from that of traditional scientific knowledge. Thus defined, dialectical knowledge constitutes the vehicle for the production of a new kind of organicity.

In short, what we have attempted in this brief communication is to highlight the political relevance of one of the central topics of Steimberg's article (2024): dialectical knowledge. Its positive development constitutes a significant contribution to understanding the subjectivity of social individuality and, as such, is part of dialectical knowledge defined as practical critique, i.e., as truly emancipatory scientific-political knowledge.